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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkkonnet.wordpress.com>

### **Should be written in crimson over the lintel of every classroom**

It was December, 2010.

I was speaking at the funeral of someone I had never met but in a few short months had come to know very well. He was Jim Neyland, a former secondary school teacher who worked in curriculum development, especially mathematics, as senior lecturer at Victoria University. He was brilliant and different; tough and unorthodox; his books a Catherine Wheel; and his ideas, I sensed, formed and brooded over on dogged bush tramps. And oh so idealistic! but tough-minded with it.

At the beginning of 2010 I was leafing through a copy of *Curriculum Matters* 4: 2008 and my eye chanced on the beginning of a paragraph, a paragraph that was to draw us together in a powerful way, and then with tragic intensity when Jim developed a fast-moving cancer. In his despair at where education was and heading, and knowing how much he had yet to say, and me being at hand, it was understandable he developed hopes for what I could do to carry the message.

Jim and I continually confirmed and were delighted to discover, how he through the academic path, and me through the curriculum one, had arrived so agreeably at what adds up to the holistic.

The paragraph that caught my attention so dramatically and spurred me to get in touch with him, begins: ***How far can you go? There is only one way to find out: you must go too far. The call 'it is only those who go too far who know how far they can go' should be written in crimson over the lintel of every classroom.***

He continues: *It is also a truth that calls us forward, beyond timidity's threshold [as he extends the metaphor]. It asks us to **be** more, to live more, to discover more, to refuse to accept either a prepackaged, [then another expression to stir the blood] settled, bounded world, or prepackaged, settled, and bounded self.*

*Going too far, he says, is not an error of judgement, or a cause for disapproval. It is an educational necessity, in the same way that sniffing the wind is a canine necessity. It is crucial we go too far. A good teacher wants their students to make a habit of going too far.*

Jim introduces this call to boldness with: *We are inclined these days to believe – if we listen attentively to the voice of authority – that the seminal question in personal and educational aspiration is: Am I there yet? Have I met the objective? Have I reached the standard? Have I followed the protocol? Have I found my true self? Well, if that is aspiration it is the sort that appeals only to the faint-hearted. A less shrinking aspiration requires a different seminal question.*

*That seminal question is how far can I go? What is the extent of my reach? Where could this idea lead? [and then he extends his argument] What is the farthest extremity of my capacity to love? What more can I do to make the world a better place? You are not here to merely make a living.*

*Woodrow Wilson said, in his 1913 Founders' Address to a gathering of Swarthmore students, 'you are here to enable the world to live more amply. You are here to enrich the world and you impoverish yourself if you forget that errand.'*

*This is a charter, Jim says, we could build education around. But how can we expect our graduating students to enable the world to live more amply, and with a finer spirit, if their education is diminished in these things? How can we live with greater vision if we are measured and cautious in our aspirations?*

As an academic, Jim's responsibility is to place his ideas in a philosophical context. He refers to Reinhold Niebuhr who observes: *that plants and most animals are unconscious of self-identity, and unaware of time or choice. They are, of course, incomplete and unfinished as growing organisms, but they are finished as beings, and in this sense, perfect. They are 'forever unpromising'.*

*We human beings, Niebuhr continues, are different; we are unfinished. We see our lives as existing in time and subject to choices. We know we are riding on time's arrow, and that we are forever the promise of something more. Possibility is immanent in us. In short, we are beings on the move, always changing, always incomplete. We humans we could say, have a perfection in not being finished, in not being perfect. We are perfect imperfection.*

Jim quotes John Macquarie as saying *our human nature is to be 'beings-on-the-way'.*

*Education, Jim says, can fail to be in harmony with our nature as beings-on-the-way. In particular, an education that is closed, unfulfilling, joyless, and without enchantment of elements of surprise is discordant with the nature of what it is to be a human being.*

He stresses two points: *Humans are unique in being able to live in time by forming abstractions and transporting these across time. Second, we humans are unique because we know that what we construct as abstractions and other cultural artefacts are not the way things actually are. We know that our concepts and categories are not unquestionable certainties. Our understandings are always provisional, always subject to change, never final. Our responsibility for constructing our understandings, and for revising these constructions, is never finished.*

The article builds to a slippery idea to grasp but very important to education, the difference in two modes of human existence, those of **having** and **being**. They are not opposites and both are necessary, they just work on different planes. A person must know something and have something before they can be something.

From linguistic study Erich Fromm argues that the *having* mode is gaining dominance in contemporary culture with verbs increasingly being restructured as nouns, for instance, 'I have a problem' rather than 'I am troubled'.

Jim then transfers the two modes of *having* and *being* to learning (and by the way you might be able to guess the education thinker soon to make an appearance, being very much his territory). Fromm detailed the two *having* modes in learning as first, students simply being presented with information to record; and second, students, while actively restructuring the content they receive, not doing enough with it for it to become part of their own individual way of thinking — not significantly changing or enriching them.

John Dewey is introduced to explain the *being* mode: *Instruction in subject matter that does not fit into any problem already stirring in the student's own experience, or that is not presented in such a way as to arouse a problem, is worse than useless for intellectual purposes. In that it fails to enter any process of reflection, it is useless; in that it remains in the mind as so much limber and debris, it is a barrier, another obstruction in the way of effective thinking when a problem arises.*

Jim says: *Collectively, this boils down to the assertion that there is in modern education a powerful tide of influence, largely unconscious, that is shaping the form and direction of the curriculum. As a result of this tidal force, things like the outcome-led curriculum, the scientific management of education, assessment systems, and much else besides, seem to be good and proper in education. Their rightness is seen to be, as it were, unquestionable.*

All the time Jim was so seriously ill, he struggled to complete his firecracker of a book: [Rediscovering the Spirit of Education After Scientific Management](#).

Jim ... thank-you.

